

BUSINESS

Rubio for VP? Not likely, but why not?



Capital Curmudgeon
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There's not much chance Donald Trump will choose U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio as his running mate, but the recent buzz about it is an entertaining opportunity to play "what if" in the run-up to the Republican National Convention this summer.

Weirder things have happened, especially when Florida is involved.

Could Americans put two Floridians in charge for the next four years? Would Rubio attract many of the Hispanic voters whose support, polls indicate, President Joe Biden is losing? Does anybody remember, or care about, the nasty personal things he said about Trump when they ran against each other in 2016? And if a Trump-Rubio ticket wins, who might Gov. Ron DeSantis appoint to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate? But first, what about the U.S. Constitution?

Contrary to a shorthand assumption made by some political commentators, the 12th Amendment does not forbid two candidates from the state being president and vice president. It says members of the Electoral College must vote for a candidate to fill each of those offices — at least one of whom must not be from the state where those electors live.



Marco Rubio, left, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and John Kasich listen to the national anthem before the start of the Republican debate on March 10, 2016, in Coral Gables. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

So, if they team up and win on Nov. 5, Trump and Rubio would have a while to decide what to do before the electors meet on Dec. 17. One of them could move elsewhere or, if they won big enough, they could write off Florida's 30 electoral votes for one of the offices. It takes 270 electoral votes to win. Trump received 304 electoral votes when he beat Hillary Clinton in 2016, including the 29 votes Florida had then. But if he hadn't had them, he still would have won by five votes.

Democrats are talking bravely about flipping Florida blue this year, but that's not likely. Recent polls in a half-dozen swing states indicate that Trump might wind up with an Electoral College cushion without our ballots.

Still, it would be a foolish gamble for Trump to write off Florida, and Rubio

wouldn't bring enough to the ticket to justify the risk.

But just for what-ifs, let's suppose a Trump-Rubio ticket carried Florida but wound up with fewer than 300 electoral votes. So, our electors could go ahead and send Trump back to the White House, then vote for someone else as vice president.

If no one had 270 electoral votes for vice president, the U.S. Senate would decide. The Senate could then elect Rubio, or anyone else Trump tells Republicans to select. The Constitution only says the Electoral College can't elect two candidates from the same state — not that the Senate can't.

More than a dozen prominent Republican leaders visited Trump this month, each of them tactfully feigning no interest in the vice presidency while heaping

praise on the nominee-in-waiting. That meant taking back nasty things some of them had said about Trump previously, but that's not hard when in full-grovel mode at Mar-a-Lago.

Rubio's ridicule was nastier than most eight years ago. He called Trump "the most vulgar person to ever aspire to the presidency" and a "con artist." Without elaborating, Rubio also remarked, "You know what they say about men with small hands" — a leering first in presidential politics.

But that, as they say, was then and this is now. He was a reliable MAGA man during and after Trump's presidency, voting against both impeachments and voting with Trump on issues.

As vice president, Rubio would be the instant frontrunner for the 2028 GOP nomination to succeed Trump. At age 53, he has a solidly conservative, scandal-free record and was easily re-elected just two years ago. There's little or no danger of the GOP losing his seat if he opted out of it early.

Florida has never produced a vice-presidential nominee, and that's not likely to change in this campaign. But Trump and the Republican Party could do worse.

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Council

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downtown overlay, yet the proposal was approved by the city's Land Use and Zoning Committee and — subsequently — the City Council as a whole.

Thus, it seems that recommendations from the city's own development advisory groups also carry limited weight with this City Council.

The downtown zoning overlay clearly stipulates self-storage facilities are not permitted inside its boundaries, yet these prohibitions were ignored. Approval of the self-storage facility illustrated zoning rules and overlays have limited value as quality control mechanisms with this City Council.

Approval of the facility also illustrated how a planned unit development can be used to circumvent any zoning rule or overlay, allowing the developer to shapeshift the proposal as needed. The addition of affordable housing units to the self-storage facility gave the council the cover needed to approve the proposal — even though it will be an eyesore and out of character for the neighborhood.

For many years, decisions regarding building placement in communities were guided by the notion that new structures should complement or enhance the architectural style of existing buildings. Approval of a self-storage facility at the entryway to San Marco illustrated that the City Council is now guided by the philosophy "Something is better than nothing."

It also suggests that this council feels free to redefine a neighborhood's



A company has been given the greenlight for building a self-storage facility at the corner of Hendricks Avenue and Prudential Drive on the Southbank of downtown Jacksonville, where a Thai food restaurant now stands.

DAVID BAUERLEIN/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

architecture and its character of a neighborhood.

Throughout the approval process, the council routinely ignored District 5 Councilman Joe Carlucci's opposition to the development. Apparently the tradition of deferring to the preferences of the council member representing an impacted district is now a "quaint notion" and a thing of the past.

Are you detecting a pattern of behavior for this City Council?

The only positive outcome of this multi-year saga was that it yielded a voting guide for upcoming elections. Council members who voted to approve

this self-storage facility should have a red flag by their names and two red flags by the name of the project's cheerleader, District 13 Councilman Rory Diamond.

Voters would be well-served to question why these individuals are seeking elected office; is it to serve the people or simply for self-promotion?

In sum, this process revealed that our City Council now disregards the guideposts and practices that have guided the body for decades. They seem to have a fetish for self-storage facilities that will not be satiated by approval of this facility. What else would explain the willingness of council members to debase

themselves as an institution?

If you feel this column is an overstatement, monitor the activities of the recently formed special committee to examine the activities of the Downtown Investment Authority. You may find the committee is more of an effort to micro-manage and preen than a genuine effort to improve downtown.

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This guest column is the opinion of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of the Times-Union. We welcome a diversity of opinions.

THC

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there is a glaring hole in Florida's regulation of intoxicating substances — hemp-derived tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly referred to as THC.

Congress legalized hemp production in 2018 and Florida followed suit the next year. Since then, we've seen a boom in products containing hemp-derived alternative cannabinoids like Delta-8 THC. These products are largely unregulated and can be sold anywhere — at gas stations, convenience stores or so-called "smoke shops." They are widely accessible and increasingly popular.

It would be easy to assume that products that are so widely available have been evaluated to make sure they're safe. Unfortunately, that isn't the case. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has named Delta-8 a psychoactive substance but does not evaluate it for quality or safe usage.

Because products infused with

Delta-8 contain much higher concentrations of the chemical than are naturally found in hemp, these drugs are typically synthetically derived from cannabidiol. Research on these synthetic compounds' potential impacts or side effects has been limited.

It's possible that harmful chemicals could be created as part of the process and some scientists have raised concerns that Delta-8 infused products could be contaminated due to synthetic processing and lack of regulatory oversight.

Concerns over the safety of Delta-8 THC are even higher when considering the misuse of the product by teenagers. A recent study showed that "at least one or two students in every average-sized high school class" used the substance last year. While there is still not enough research on the impact of Delta-8 on teenagers, we do know that early marijuana use is dangerous.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, marijuana use "beginning in teen years or younger may affect brain development which may impair thinking, memory and learning."

An association between early marijuana use and schizophrenia has also been reported. Given the risks, we should be seriously concerned about the prevalence of this unregulated drug among young adults.

Young children are also at risk from Delta-8 THC, due to accidental ingestion. We've seen a dramatic increase in the number of children hospitalized after consuming what they thought was candy but was, in fact, their parents' Delta-8 product. In their first year of monitoring for Delta-8 THC, national poison control centers recorded 2,362 exposure cases.

America's Poison Centers, which represents 55 poison control centers around the country, recorded over 8,000 Delta-8 related cases from 2021 to 2023. This risk is compounded by the fact that many of these intoxicating hemp products are sold in packaging that is attractive to children. It's made to look like candy, with colorful graphics and cartoon characters on the packaging.

We are not alone in our concerns over these unregulated hemp products. The

Florida legislature acted this session to pass common-sense regulations that would hold these products to "the same health and safety standards as other food products," according to the bill's sponsor.

The legislation would also ban hemp products sold in "containers displaying toys, novel shapes, animations, promotional characters, licensed characters or other features that specifically target children."

The bill has passed both chambers of the Florida Legislature and is now awaiting Gov. Ron DeSantis's signature. The legislation is set to go into effect Oct. 1, if the Governor signs it. Taken together, these regulations will go a long way toward protecting Florida's children and young people — both from the risks of youth drug use and the threat of accidental consumption.

Kathleen Roberts, CEO, Community Coalition Alliance, Jacksonville

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